The Progressive Review

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The politics of transformation

As we lurch towards yet another debilitating presidential choice, a new variety of politics is beginning to take root. It is too early to say whether it will become an effective and permanent alternative to what we now glumly call politics, yet even in its nascent form it offers the best hope that we can still reverse America's extraordinary flight from democracy and decency.

This politics is so new and so decentralized that it doesn't even have a name. Except I think that John Rensenbrink may have given it one back in 1992 in the title of his book, *The Greens and the Politics of Transformation.*[1] Rensenbrink, who teaches at Bowdoin College, has been a mainstay of the Maine Greens -- the earliest Green party in the nation. For many outside the state, he has also been a gentle and wise Maine guide through the political woods.

Rensenbrink used the phrase -- the politics of transformation -- to describe a holistic politics and economics, that goes "from local to global and back again, that goes beyond where the left has left it, both in theory and in practice."

At its heart, the politics of transformation separates quickly from both left and right because it proposes not only new policies but a dramatically new way of going about politics itself. It proposes a politics centered not around institutions but around communities -- and not around power but around consent.

At a moment when both of the old parties are using increasingly disgusting means to reach their ends, the politics of transformation argues that the ends don't justify their means -- but that the means determine the ends. You can not, in short, have a decent society without a decent politics. Thus Rensenbrink sees the politics of transformation as being based on

> a non-violent evolutionary method of seeking fundamental change. The change sought is in the direction of a consensus-building democracy, a community-based and ecologically sustainable economy and a person-centered social policy.

Such a social policy insists that the "freedom, mutual responsibility, and identities of all citizens are nurtured, respected, and celebrated."

In Rensenbrink's view:

> Transformation can be conserving, reform-minded or revolutionary, depending on the context in which action is considered and taken. Transformation means reinvigorating citizens with a sense of personal worth and responsibility, it means reviving grass roots both in business and in government, it means choosing communities and the environment over the profits and power of megacorporations and big government . . .
>
> Transformation requires both a sturdy defense of communities and persons and a resolute will to fundamentally alter the power structures of society at all levels. This includes the need for a sincere turn to electoral politics as a primary vehicle of transformation. . . . This cannot be done through the two major parties, it needs to be done through new transformationally grounded political parties.

This is a big order and one that goes well beyond that of traditional radical or left politics. For example, in Ronnie Dugger's deservedly praised call last summer in the *Nation* -- "Real Populists Please Stand Up" -- he asks what government is about. Dugger cites a UAW worker as saying that government is about "control, you know, who controls who." Then he quotes the southwestern organizer Ernesto Cortes Jr. as saying, "Power! Power comes in two forms; organized people and organized money." To govern ourselves, concludes Dugger, "power is what we need. To get it we must want it and organize for it."

[1] R & E Miles, San Pedro, CA 1992

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The politics of transformation sets a different -- not contradictory but certainly braver and more morally rooted -- standard. Says Rensenbrink, "The goal is not just to replace existing power with another power but to alter the way power is exercised." Political transformers, therefore, believe that not only must political power change, but the politician and the citizen as well, those exercising it and those affected by it. As in the decades before the American revolution and during the civil rights, environmental and women's movements, we must let the catalytic legislative body become the congress of our own hearts and minds.

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The model for transformational politics is the Green political movement. Started in Germany in the early 1980s, the Green Party from the beginning intended to change not only what was done but how it was done. German Green Petra Kelly called the Greens an "anti-party party" that stood for "shared power" rather than "power over." In 1987, Kelly said, "Just repairing the existing system cannot be the solution for the Green Parties. Our aim is non-violent transformation."

Not since the rise of the social welfare state has a political idea captured such rapid and far-flung interest. Today there are Green parties in more than three score countries -- without the assistance or direction of any centralized organization. It just happened, the way really important things often do.

Although environmental concerns were high on the agenda, the Greens were far more than simply an environmental party. For one thing, you can not get very far into environmental issues without stumbling across what Barry Commoner cited as the first rule of ecology: "Everything is connected to everything else." And once you accept this notion then it is not long before you begin to see, in Kelly's words, that "there is a profound relationship between the fact that women and children are attacked, beaten and raped, and the fact that nuclear war and ecological catastrophe threaten our planet." And once you accept this, you begin to see that the inter-connectedness extends not only to apparently disparate phenomena but to the various strata of existence at which they occur. Politics becomes no longer a simple matter of voting or debating "issues" but a pattern of personal habits and responsibilities. At this point, the antiseptic models of the Kennedy School or the Clinton White House or the American Enterprise Institute start to seem vacuous at best, destructive at worst.

The transformational politics of the Greens stands in stark contrast to the two major American parties because it demands not only a central place for the

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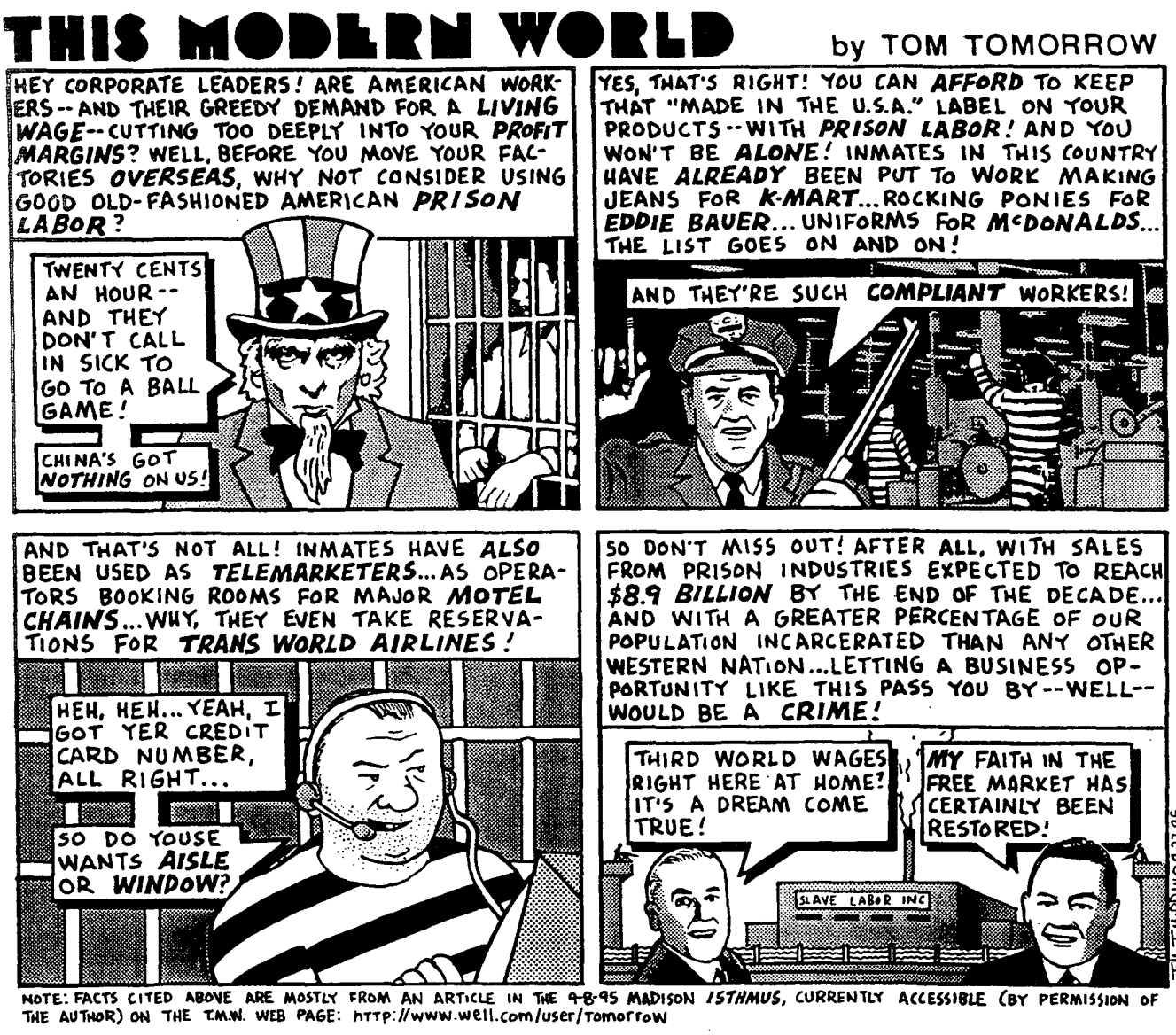
THIS MODERN WORLD
by TOM TOMORROW
HEY CORPORATE LEADERS! ARE AMERICAN WORKERS -- AND THEIR GREEDY DEMAND FOR A LIVING WAGE -- CUTTING TOO DEEPLY INTO YOUR PROFIT MARGINS? WELL, BEFORE YOU MOVE YOUR FACTORIES OVERSEAS, WHY NOT CONSIDER USING GOOD OLD-FASHIONED AMERICAN PRISON LABOR?
TWENTY CENTS AN HOUR -- AND THEY DON'T CALL IN SICK TO GO TO A BALL GAME!
CHINA'S GOT NOTHING ON US!
YES, THAT'S RIGHT! YOU CAN AFFORD TO KEEP THAT "MADE IN THE U.S.A." LABEL ON YOUR PRODUCTS -- WITH PRISON LABOR! AND YOU WON'T BE ALONE! INMATES IN THIS COUNTRY HAVE ALREADY BEEN PUT TO WORK MAKING JEANS FOR K-MART... ROCKING PONIES FOR EDDIE BAUER... UNIFORMS FOR McDONALDS... THE LIST GOES ON AND ON!
AND THEY'RE SUCH COMPLIANT WORKERS!
AND THAT'S NOT ALL! INMATES HAVE ALSO BEEN USED AS TELEMARKETERS... AS OPERATORS BOOKING ROOMS FOR MAJOR MOTEL CHAINS... WHY, THEY EVEN TAKE RESERVATIONS FOR TRANS WORLD AIRLINES!
HEH, HEH... YEAH, I GOT YER CREDIT CARD NUMBER, ALL RIGHT...
SO DO YOUSE WANTS AISLE OR WINDOW?
SO DON'T MISS OUT! AFTER ALL, WITH SALES FROM PRISON INDUSTRIES EXPECTED TO REACH $8.9 BILLION BY THE END OF THE DECADE... AND WITH A GREATER PERCENTAGE OF OUR POPULATION INCARCERATED THAN ANY OTHER WESTERN NATION... LETTING A BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY LIKE THIS PASS YOU BY -- WELL -- WOULD BE A CRIME!
THIRD WORLD WAGES RIGHT HERE AT HOME? IT'S A DREAM COME TRUE!
MY FAITH IN THE FREE MARKET HAS CERTAINLY BEEN RESTORED!
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individual but for the exercise of individual will and of responsibility. In this it echoes both America's transcendentalists and Europe's existentialists. From the former comes the notion of ecological unity -- as Emerson said, "the world globes itself in a drop of dew." From the latter, a rejection of predestination and the concomitant need for people to form their own morality and then to act upon it. Together, they eschew false icons of authority, celebrate free will and propose that we use it wisely. It is a far more difficult politics than one that is merely carried out on a trading floor where promises are exchanged for money like shares of stock. But it is infinitely more optimistic as well. In Kelly's words, with such a politics we can begin "fighting for hope."

Transformational politics also stands in contrast to post-modernism, with its random larceny of the past, its avaricious co-optation of current technology and its self-serving distortion of words and meaning. Finally, transformational politics offers the public sound choices -- not between left and right but between corporatism and democracy, not between big government and big business but between overbearing institutions and supportive communities, not between winning and losing but between power and sharing, and not between oppression and anarchy but between the force of the state and the good sense of its citizens.

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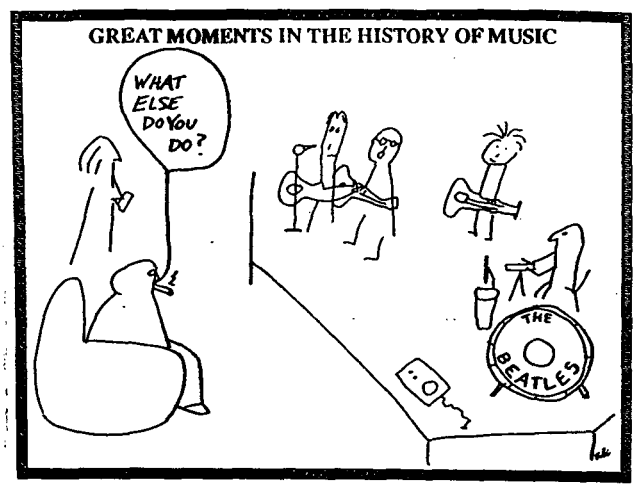
Which is not to say that Greens own the franchise on the politics of transformation. There has always been such a politics lying just below the American surface. For example, 25 years ago I wrote the draft of what was to become the first platform of the new DC Statehood Party. A friend exhumed a copy and brought it to me the other day, and I was reminded why I sometimes claim that the DC Statehood Party was really the world's first Green Party -- we just picked the wrong name. But we were also following in the wake of earlier voices. Here is an excerpt:

> We find ourselves in much the condition of the Populist Party, which declared in its 1892 platform: "The conditions which surround us best justify our cooperation: we meet in the midst of a nation brought to the verge of moral, political and material ruin."
>
> . . . Whether we rise from our troubles depends not upon additional critiques, nor upon false dreams and promises voiced for immediate political gain, nor upon a reshuffling of the old agenda. We need a new society not new priorities. This is our task: not simply to condemn the errors of the past and present, but to construct a new community made fertile by an economic system based upon cooperation rather than profit, made free by acute attention to the demands of justice and made happy by a buoyant spirit of democracy. . .
>
> Considering human life more important than buildings, liberty more important that efficiency, the pursuit of happiness more praiseworthy than the pursuit of monetary gain, we move together beyond days of protests to days of construction. The old order will die of its own weight. It is the future that must be our primary concern.
>
> Nearly eight decades ago, Henry Demarest Lloyd, told an audience in Cook County, IL: "We talk about the coming revolution and hope it will be peaceful. The revolution has come. This use of the government of all for the enrichment and aggrandizement of the few is a revolution."

As in other moments of great tension, a spontaneous combustion of imagination is once again occurrring in places small and large as we discover how wrong we have been and how much it doesn't have to be like that. The growth of innovative and cross-cultural spirituality, the ethic of voluntary simplicity and down-sizing, the willingness of many to become what Milton Klonsky in the 1950s called the "draft-dodgers of commercial civilization," the rise of holistic medicine, and the transformational press are all signs of a quiet storm building on the plains of the American soul.

Sometimes the transformers take just a small piece of our disabled and distorted culture to revive -- a school, a neighborhood, an idea that remains untried, or a group of Americans the larger society has rejected. These people will tell you they are not politicians, but in their very choice of community over institutional structure they have become another cell of transformational politics. . And they instinctively accept the notion that John L. McKnight put well in a 1987 issue of *Social Policy:*

> The structure of institutions is a design established to create control of people. On the other hand, the structure of associations is the result of people acting through consent. . . You will know that you are in a community if you often hear laughter and singing. You will know you are in an institution, corporation, or bureaucracy if you hear the silence of long halls and reasoned meetings.



Here are a few things that are not representative of the politics of transformation: the Clinton administration, the 104th Congress, the meglamedia, the vast majority of Washington public interest groups, academia, the traditional left, most op-ed columnists, anyone allowed on the Jim Lehrer news show, the more upscale of the alternative press, and gold toilet handles on personal Gulfstream jets. These are phenomena of a politics of relative power, of markets, of ritualized opposition and of the conservation and restoration of myths. These are phenomena that sit like parts of a Calder mobile or move with the predictability of a well-tuned gyroscope. In the end, they demand little, assist little, change little.

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Because of the importance of the *how* as well as the *what* one does, on the other hand, the politics of transformation throws up unexpected ideas, tests unexpected approaches and forms unexpected alliances. For example, out of last summer's third party summit meeting came a startling consensus from members of 26 different parties including not only Greens, but a founder of the old far left American Labor Party,

. . . An interview with Tree Frog

The following interview was conducted by Edward 'Cash' Wallace, an 18-old reporter for YO!, *a youth paper published in the San Francisco Bay area by Pacific News Service*

Q: How old are you, Tree?

TF: Twelve.

Q: Why do they call you Tree Frog?

TF: Because I'm always hopping around from place to place.

Q: Where do you live?

TF: In San Francisco, with my mother.

Q: Can you describe home?

TF: I'm never home because it's dirty. My mother don't care about nothing. She's always shooting up her needles with her nasty-looking boyfriends, who mess up the house more.

Q: How long have you known your mom to use drugs?

TF: Since I can remember. She didn't always shoot needles. She used to smoke crack when I was young.

Q: When you were young?

TF: Yeah. When I was young. Age ain't nothing but a number. I've been through hella s... in my life. I saw homies die right before my eyes. I saw a whole bunch of dope-fiends overdose and die off of all kinds of drugs. Right now my mother isn't taking care of me, I'm taking care of her. I gotta deal with me, her and the game.

Q: The game?

TF: The game is the art of making money on the streets. I gotta buy all my food and clothes and pay rent, so I sell whatever I can sell. Sometimes weed and sometimes rocks, and sometimes I deliver pistols for this baller I know.

Q: What is a baller?

TF: Somebody living lavish in the game—I'm on my way there.

Q: Do you have a gun?

TF: Hell, yeah. I got a 357 magnum, a 22, and a 9 mm.

Q: Why do you carry them?

TF: I have to stay protected in case some fools try to roll by and shoot or rob me. It's extra hard to survive when everybody tries to take advantage of my size and age. It's like Tupac (the rapper) said, "It's hard to survive weighing 165 in the city where the skinny niggas die," except I weigh 95.

Q: How long have you been selling dope?

TF: For about five years. Ever since my mother started doing it bad and I had to take care of myself.

Q: Did you ever see her use her drugs?

TF: Yeah, all the time. She doesn't care.

Q: Did you ever try any of them?

TF: Only when she had weed. I never messed with her other shit. The first time I saw her shoot her needles she started going crazy. Her eyes rolled around and she started knocking everything over, and then she fell and started shaking on the floor.

Q: What did you do?

TF: I closed the door, and remembered when my father would act like that—but instead of knocking all our stuff down he would knock my mother down for no reason.

Q: Tell me about your father.

TF: My father died when I was six. Somebody shot him in the head while I was out somewhere with my mom. I was kind of happy when he died because he wasn't a father, really. He was just my mother's pimp and they had me on a fluke.

Q: Does your mother still prostitute?

TF: Yeah, but not for money. For those damn needles. Some of the people I get my dope from even used my mother before.

Q: You sound as if you don't care.

TF: She don't give a damn about me, so why care? But I don't trip. I stay calm. You gotta compose on the streets, or be a victim of the game.

Q: What is a victim of the game?

TF: My mother, my father, and the rest of my dead homies.

Q: Do you ever wish they were still around?

TF: Yeah, but the same thing would probably just happen to them later on. If I did have a wish I wouldn't wish for that.

Q: What would you wish for?

TF: I would want a chance to do all the things that regular people my age do. I want a chance to be like all the other kids, with a regular mother and a father, so I could be without all these damn worries. I wanna be young.

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refugees from Perotism and contemporary conservative libertarians. The group unanimously agreed to support proportional representation; campaign finance reform; initiative, referendum and recall; better ballot access; the end of corporate welfare; strong environmental policies; sexual and reproductive freedom; an end to the war on drugs (and treatment of addiction as a health matter rather than as a crime); a dramatic cut in military expenditures; workplace democracy and the maximum empowerment of people in their communities "consistent with fairness, social responsibilities and human rights."

Here are a few of transformational principles that those of us who organized the conference used to help this happen:

- A consistent emphasis on points of agreement rather than disagreement.
- Reliance on consensus and the reduction of win-lose situations.
- Trained moderators
- Respect for all participants.

Some of the techniques used were simple but effective. For example, there was a need for small issue area groups to narrow down the number of policies with which they would deal. All suggested policies were first written on newsprint posters. Participants were given three color stick-on dots upon which their names had been written. Everyone then went up to the newsprint board and placed their dots on their favorite issues (cumulative voting style, so that all three dots could be placed on one issue if desired). After the vote, those who had affixed the only dot on a particular policy were allowed to move it to their second choice (a la preference voting) and so forth until a clear consensus of three policies emerged. The result was not only an intellectual consensus, but an activity that was physical, visual and fun.

When the various groups had produced their recommendations, the large group conducted "fishbowl" negotiations. Under the rules, each small group selected a representative to negotiate for it. The chosen representatives sat in a circle; immediately behind them were those they represented. Anyone could stop their representative and request a small group conference but only the representative could speak in the larger assembly. It worked remarkably well.

Interestingly, the small group that had the most difficulty with such techniques was comprised mainly of Marxists who had selected economics as their area of concern. We were apparently guilty of what the master called "parliamentary cretinism," and the socialists resisted it firmly. One result, ironically, was that the weakest section of the final statement dealt with economics. On the other hand, the libertarians came to the organizers at one point and offered to leave the meeting so a full consensus could be maintained. We encouraged them to stick around, changing our own rules to accept several levels of consensus.

Despite the wide range of views present, despite the near total absence of Robert's Rules of Order, the final document called, with full consensus, for nothing less than a major transformation of America's approach to elections, the environment, drugs and the military. Not bad for a meeting at which nobody yelled at anyone.

The definition of transformational politics is far from complete. Old habits intrude and old questions go unanswered. Even someone as habitually positive as John Rensenbrink, for example, still feels compelled to make the traditional disclaimer protecting against rhetorical lawsuits by noting redundantly that transformational politics "means fighting for a world free of racism, sexism, homophobia, and of all forms of bigotry and exclusivism." A world in which an absence of malice represents the definition of virtue is not a transformed world.

And some American Greens have adopted among their ten central beliefs "feminism" or "post-patriarchal values." If pressed, these Greens will tell you that men can have such values, too, but it doesn't take a semiotician to tell you whose sign is on the door.

Here, as elsewhere in American culture, we find a big stumbling block of transformation. Here the leap has yet to be made; words and ideas are still scratching for a foothold from which to take off. It's partly a matter of finding the right phrases, ones less distorted either by guilt or jingoism. It can be done. Petra Kelly, for example, once spoke of the desire of Green women to "restore a balance, a harmony between the feminine and the masculine." -- a felicitous phrase that deserves revival.

But it is also a lot more complex. For all the exorcising of racism by both black and white progressives, there is not yet much of a multi-cultural politics of transformation. The best, on the whole, is a version of what psychologists call parallel play: small children functioning in the same room, but not with each other.

Part of the problem is that neither blacks nor whites are ready to adopt a transformational approach to race itself, such as telling the truth that it doesn't even exist. We leave that to the anthropologists and biologists and then proceed through our politics as though their findings were totally irrelevant. In so doing we accept not transformation's message of liberation and individual responsibility, but a permanent sentencing of some to victimhood and others to guilt.

Likewise, there are not many signs of a black politics of transformation, perhaps because blacks, unlike many whites, can still remember leaders who did something for them. The last real black politics of transformation -- the civil rights movement -- has withered, but its echoes are still clear and the history of failed faith is still short.

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While the current appeal is to nationalism and self-sufficiency, there remains the 12.1% problem. That's the percentage of blacks in the US according to the 1990 census. After you've brought this 12.1% together, after you've slain its evil spirits, celebrated its virtues, instilled its pride and provided it with the tools of survival, once you have preened it and redeemed it, 12.1% is still only one-eighth of the American population.

Because the prospects of coalition or assimilation justifiably raise the specter of political impotence or cultural destruction, the separatist tendency has remained a powerful force for over a quarter of a century. And while it has helped mightily through miserable times, it has also made blacks vulnerable to leaders quite comfortable with a homogeneous and weak constituency and who would far rather inveigh against evil than actually change it.

There are ways out of this dilemma. The classic American solution is for a minority to lead the majority, to universalize its own experience and pain and wisdom so it can help others as well. It seems daunting, but there are some shortcuts. For example, Martin Luther King, Cesar Chavez and Nelson Mandela all became important voices of white as well as black America through a variety of boycott. Boycotts are a wonderful way for people who can't yet play together to say that they would like to.

There are also elements of transformational politics, such as consensus and new ways of counting votes, that deal directly with the weakness (and sometimes paranoia) that minorities can feel when they contemplate joining with others. And there are a number of black transformational voices. For example, Keith Watters, president of the 17,000 member National Bar Association. has argued that in the next century a majority of America will be people of color and that current minorities have to prepare for their new role. "We'll be leading white people," he said. "I'm trying to get people to stop looking at these old models of racial injustice and look at the models of racial harmony. We need to create a new vision of us as leader of all of society."

There is, in short, a lot of unfinished business. The design of transformational politics is far from complete. The practice is rough, stumbling, and at times precious. For the moment though, it is enough to know that it is there, it is alive and that there may be more of us than we think. It is enough to know that every day, one by one, in small groups or in robust crowds, more and more are answering the question of Rimbaud:

> When will we go beyond the beaches and the mountains, to greet the birth of the new task, the new wisdom, the flight of tyrants and demons, the end of superstitions. . . .?"

Their answer is simply this: now, with a new politics of transformation. -- *Sam Smith*

Weather Report

A fair vote for president

Should they desire, states have the power to dramatically improve the presidential voting system right now -- without a constitutional amendment or even congressional action. All they would have to do is to pass a law adopting majority preference voting for president, such as is used in Ireland. The new laws would require that the winning candidate in the state receive over 50% of the vote to obtain any electors. Voters would rank their choices on the ballot. If no one received 50% in the first round, the ballots of the least popular candidate would be redistributed according to the second choices on those ballots, a process repeated in subsequent rounds until someone obtained a majority.

Here's how this might work. Let's say that Clinton, Dole, Perot and Jackson are all in the race. In the first round, no one gets over 50% and Jackson pulls the least votes, so his ballots are redistributed. Most of these go to Clinton, boosting his total but not enough to have him declared a winner. So in the next round, the ballots of the third place candidate, Perot, are redistributed. They are split evenly between Dole and Clinton but because Clinton needed fewer votes to reach a majority, he is declared the winner, taking all the electoral votes of that state.

The advantages of this system are considerable:

-- We would no longer elect presidents with only a plurality of the vote as happened in 1992.

-- Third party candidates would play a significant and constructive role. As the Rainbow Coalition has pointed out, for example, a Jackson candidacy could no longer be viewed as a spoiler race: "With MPV, a Jesse Jackson candidacy would help beat the Republican candidate. Jackson would bring progressives out to vote, and they would be likely to list Clinton as their second choice." Jakcson would have the best chance possible to beat Clinton but if he finished behind him in a particular state, his ballots would probably go to Clinton and thus not split the vote.

-- Majority preference voting would encourage a more diverse range of candidates and greater voter

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turnout, as well as reducing the sense of alienation that many citizens currently feel.

-- MPV would eliminate the danger of a fractious battle over the presidency in the House of Representatives.

Would majority preference voting merely confirm the first place plurality position of whoever was leading in the first round? Not necessarily. For example, in the 1990 Irish presidential election, Brian Lenihan led in the first round with 44% of the vote (about Clinton's margin in 1992). In second place was Mary Robinson with 39%. After third-place candidate Austin Currie's ballots were recounted by second choices, Robinson picked up an additional 14% while Lenihan got only 3% more. The result: Mary Robinson won with 53%. Using our system would have resulted in the second most popular candidate being elected president.

Meanwhile, Rep. Cynthia McKinney has introduced an important new bill that would allow states to adopt modified voting systems for the election of members of Congress. This would provide an alternative to the racial gerrymandering of districts that has come under judicial fire. Here are the three systems that McKinney's bill would permit:

-- *Limited voting:* Voters cast no more votes than half of the seats. In a three-member congressional district this would give the voter one vote.

-- *Cumulative voting:* Voters cast votes up to the number of seats to be elected. Voters may distribute votes among candidates or give one candidate all of the votes.

-- *Preference voting:* Voters rank the candidates.

[For more on all of this and to stay in touch with the electoral reform movement, call the Center for Voting & Democracy at 202-882-7378 or e-mail to cvdusa@aol.com.]

Old news

The Washington Post finally got around to telling its readers about approval voting last October. We first told you in 1976.

In mid-October, our issue with "A few questions for General Powell" was out and circulating around the capital. On October 29, George Will's column was printed in the Post under the headline "22 questions for Colin Powell." Of course, our questions were a tad different -- and we had 35 of them. Besides, Will always did hold deja views.

October Surprise returns

When the media uncritically accepted a congressional task force's conclusion that there was nothing to the October Surprise, it looked like the story was dead. But at least one reporter kept on the case: Robert Parry, an author & PBS documentary producer who has worked for the AP and Newsweek. Digging through the House task force files, Parry found that, in response to the task force's request, the Russian secretary of state security, Nikolay Kuznetsov, had sent a report stating that Casey, George Bush and other Republicans had met secretly with Iranian officials in Europe during the 1980 presidential campaign. The Russians depicted the hostage negotiations that year as a two-war competition between the Carter White House and the Reagan campaign to outbid one another for Iran's cooperation on the hostages. The Russians asserted that the Reagan team had disrupted Carter's hostage negotiations after all, the exact opposite of the task force conclusion. The full story on this can be found on the Web at http://www.delve.com/consort.html.

Round 2 of Third Parties '96 will take place at George Washington University in Washington on January 5-7. Among the topics: should other states and parties join the California Greens in supporting Ralph Nader for president? Also further development of a common ground platform and workshops and panels on third party organizing. Info: call TP96 at 703-642-5710 or you can e-mail lindamartin@igc.org. For information on the California Nader campaign call 510-444-GREEN

Sleazy, supermarket tabloid stuff

Your editor has publicly predicted (on Washington's WMAL and Channel 19) that Clinton will not be running for re-election due to the Whitewater scandal. If things go well for Clinton, he may emulate LBJ and Truman and announce his decision in late March. If the current drip-drip-drip of revelations turn into a torrent, it may happen sooner.

Your editor has put his money where his mouth is and owes several Washington correspondents a free meal if he is wrong. Of more consequence is that if he is wrong, the GOP will have a field day telling the voters in campaign ads what the pro-Clinton media has declined to tell them in the news. Whitewater is the worst

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covered national story in decades. The sooner Clinton leaves, the better for the Dems.

Left of the hard right, few journalists have given the scandal the respect it deserves. Two exceptions have been Alexander Cockburn, and Christopher Hitchens. Cockburn and Hitchens are Brits, from a land which specializes in scandals and knows a sordid story when it sees one. In fact, readers of London's *Telegraph* know a good deal more about Whitewater than the average American.

Why is the Washington media so aggressively disinterested in pursuing the story? Habit and culture probably offer more clues than any dark and sinister hypothesis. Listening to the Clintonites and their media supporters you find that one key reason they feel Clinton is clean is because the Republicans are so rotten. Evidence is being dismissed not on the basis of its merits, but based on who speaks of it. Thus, Al D'Amato or the conservative Western Journalism Center are cited as proof that Clinton did nothing wrong. It is, however, a syllogistic error of the first water to hold facts to blame for those who point them out. If cops could only accept evidence from upstanding individuals, they would solve few crimes.

The good word

What is a village? A village is an autonomous social unit, with a reason for existing where it is, and with discernible boundaries, traditionally inhabited by members of a limited number of extended families. What is a suburb? A dependent social unit, with no internal reason for its existence. -- *Olivia Tsosie, New Mexico Designer/Builder*

Roadsigns

Number of nation's prison full-time employees in 1992: 523,000. Number of Fortune 500 corporations with more workers than that: 1 (General Motors). [USA Today]

Change in the birthrate of welfare mothers in New Jersey in the first year following imposition of a state cap denying additional funds for new children compared

Details

• Christopher Hitchens reports that *The Madness of King George* was titled *The Madness of George III* until "the industry" decided that people might think they had missed parts one and two.

• Newton Gingrich's concern over aviation ambiance is not new. While a simple member of Congress he hitched a ride to Georgia In Air Force One with Ronald Reagan. He later wrote his constituents: "The service, as you would expect, was extraordinary. The attendants assigned to Air Force One are used to taking care of foreign dignitaries and people the President needs to talk with. As we flew down, they served breakfast. It was sausage, pancakes and scrambled eggs. I had this chance because you elected me as your Representative. And I hope through reading this, you now feel you were, in a sense, with me on the plane." Yeah, but we bet in an hour we'll feel hungry again.

• Rep. Dornan claims that he has worked throughout his 18 years in Congress on behalf of term limits.

• From an AP story on a military murder case: "The ensign reportedly broke the petty officer's neck and stabbed him repeatedly with a steak knife before dismembering the body with a hands. The body was then dumped in a school's trash container, police reported. 'This kind of incident is extremely rare. I don't ever remember anything like this happening here, and I've been here since 1969,' said base spokesman Richard Bradshaw.

• According to the *Washington Times*, reporters flying on presidential trips did even better than young Rep. Gingrich. They were accustomed to four-course meals, typically including fresh salmon, French champagne and wine, and single-malt scotch. Bottomless bags of candy, nuts and fruit were usually available. On a Bush campaign trip to New Hampshire, Charles Bierbauer of CNN yelled at a White House travel aide because the jetliner was not equipped with an over and could not provide Mr. Bierbauer with a hot lunch.

• The USIA recently funded a seminar in Hawaii titled "Towards an Asian/Pacific Cultural Studies." According to the invitation, "Asia-Pacific serves as a powerful political-economic signifier to bespeak the border-crossing expansionism and cash-driven transnationalizing economies from Taipei to Honolulu . . . This talk will contest the makings of APEC's 'Asia-Pacific' by fleshing out micropolitical dimensions of the call across the region for a more trenchantly localized 'Asia-Pacific Cultural Studies' that is being carried out in the key globalized localities and heteroglossic Asian/Pacific islands of Taiwan and Hawaii."

• [Politics] is a series of unsentimental transactions between those who need votes and those who have power. -- *Chicken king Don Tyson*

• I have enormous personal ambition. I want to shift the entire planet. And I'm doing it. -- *Newton Gingrich to the Washington Post, 1985*

• We're meeting about that tomorrow. I'll have an answer for you by the end of the week. -- *White House senior advisor on being asked by Mother Jones editor Joel Klein in 1994 what exactly it was that Clinton believes in.*

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to a control group allowed to receive additional funds for new children: 0 [Washington Post]

The United Nations' biggest dues deadbeat: The US. Amount owed: $1.2 billion. Amount owed by US as a percent of all moneys owed UN: 43% [New York Times]

Mass transit aid as a percent of highway aid in 1991 prior to the passage of a major federal bill designed to foster a more mixed approach to transportation: 22%

Mass transit aid as a percent of highway aid in 1995 after passage of the bill in 1991: 23%

Annual loss of daily newspapers in US since turn of the century: 16 [The Washington Spectator]

Number of wiretap requests brought by federal officials before the secret Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court 1979-94: 8,130. Number of requests denied: 0 [Secrecy & Government Bulletin]

Amount Time-Warner is paying in interest on its $15 billion debt: $90,000 an hour. [Vanity Fair]

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Amount reporter Christopher Barry made panhandling in Portland ME for fifty hours, asking over 2200 people for spare change: $60.44.

Per hour income: $1.20 [Casco Bay Weekly]

Salary of average American factory worker as a percentage of the pay of an average chief executive of a Fortune 500 corporation: 6/10 of one percent. [London Telegraph]

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